DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 838 SP 030 158

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TITLE The Essential Ingredients: Cooperation between Universities and School Districts on Staff Development. Occasional Paper No. 16.
INSTITUTION National Staff Development Council, Oxford, OH.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; *Cooperative Programs; *Delivery Systems; Higher Education; Information Networks; *Inservice Education; Institutional Cooperation; Program Effectiveness; Protocol Analysis; *School Districts; Staff Development; State Programs; *Universities
IDENTIFIERS *Florida

ABSTRACT

Under the Teacher Education Center (TEC) Act in Florida, the state's universities, colleges and public school districts were placed into a collaborative working relationship. Using money allocated by the state, school districts can contract with one or more universities or colleges for the delivery of inservice. This paper illustrates strategies for strengthening university-school district cooperative inservice efforts acquired during 12 years of TEC experience. In particular, the paper focuses on protocol, communication networks, internal and external communication, and consultant effectiveness. Because the paper addresses the concept of university-school district cooperative efforts, the procedures presented are applicable regardless of whether a formal TEC is in operation or not. (JD)

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THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS:

COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT

by

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* Occasional Paper Series

National Staff Development Council

Occasional Paper No. 16

April 1986

SP030158

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Educational literature attests to the growing abundance of cases in which universities and school districts are conducting cooperative inservice programs. (Ladd, 1969; Houston and Freiberg, 1979; Hechinger, 1984; Collins, 1971; Gollnick and Massanari, 1981; Wilbur, 1984). The bulk of this growth has been within the past 5 to 10 years and has, in many cases, been a learn-as-you-go process. In spite of the increased activity, the results were often less than anticipated. Despite sincere efforts on the part of both parties, many efforts were simply not productive and often frustrating. During the past 12 years, though, universities and school districts, under Florida's Teacher Education Centers (TEC) model, have developed a strong, healthy, and effective working relationship. There are problems, to be sure, but these have been minor, and have been outweighed by the benefits.

The Teacher Education Center Act was enacted by the Florida Legislature in 1973 and was renewed this year for 10 more years. Under the TEC act the state's universities, colleges and public school districts were placed into a collaborative working relationship.

Each district, based on full time student enrollment, receives an allocation from the state in the form of a blank check. The school district can then contract with one or more universities or colleges for the delivery of inservice using this blank check for payment. As a result of this arrangement, workshops have been conducted throughout the state in every academic subject area and service area. Educational personnel from school board members to bus drivers have been the recipients of inservice. Over 95 percent of the services were delivered within the school district, making TEC a true "field-based" program.

This paper will illustrate strategies for strengthening university-school district cooperative inservice efforts acquired during 12 years of TEC experience. In particular, the paper will focus on the protocol, communication networks, internal and external communication, and consultant effectiveness. Because the paper addresses the concept of university-school district cooperative efforts, the procedures presented

are applicable regardless of whether a formal TEC is in operation or not.

Protocol

The 1981 American Heritage Dictionary defines protocol as "the forms of ceremony and etiquette observed by diplomats and heads of state." Protocol is an essential ingredient when two or more groups meet. It addresses the customs, courtesies, and procedures that will be used. For instance, if the university has a project it wishes to implement in a district, should its first contact be with the superintendent or with the person who will actually work with the project? The rules change from district to district--some superintendents want to be involved at every meeting while others simply wish to be kept up to date via their own staff. Lack of understanding of the rules of protocol has led to the demise of many a well intended project. A superintendent who felt he or she was bypassed may directly or indirectly undermine the project. Consequently, before a university and school district meet to plan a staff development activity, protocol must be established and followed.

Communication Networks

Effective communication between the university and local schools must be established. Such communication strategies determine, to a large degree, whether the relationship between a university and school district will flourish or perish. In establishing a communication network, one needs to consider who will communicate with whom and through which channels. The university and school district should each appoint a person to serve as its chief communicator.

In Florida pertinent information concerning inservice flows through the school district's designated TEC director. Likewise, Florida universities appoint a faculty member to be a liaison; this person reports directly to the dean of the college of education. The university contact person receives requests from the districts and matches those requests to

the skills of qualified faculty consultants who will provide the services. The faculty contact person also attends to administrative details and represents the institution at regional TEC meetings.

Based on our experience, it is advantageous that the contact person be a regular employee of the university and possesses a doctoral degree. The turnover rate for graduate assistants is high, making it difficult to provide the continuity that is needed to establish trust. The appointment of a graduate student may also send an inaccurate message to the school district--that the university does not place a high value on the program. The doctoral degree is important since the university contact person has to deal on campus with administration and faculty whose attitudes are often formed by such credentials.

The university contact person should also have had prior public school teaching experience. Acceptance by the school district is easier to obtain when such experience and knowledge of public schools is demonstrable. It is also important that the university contact person have exceptional communication and human relations skills. It is amazing how often introverts are placed in positions of high public visibility and contact. By contrast, our experience has shown that the success of collaborative programs, to a large degree, depends on the ability of the university contact person to relate equally well with university faculty members, community resource persons, and school district personnel.

The organizational location of the contact person is also essential to good communication. In Florida, all of the university contact people are either in the dean's office or report directly to the dean of the college of education. This arrangement removes the office from the conflicts and politics typically found within academic departments and is an expression of the value the university places on the program. This placement also provides the dean with constant access to information concerning the outreach staff development service.

Internal and External Communication

It is important that each department chairperson be kept current on

the various activities of the TECs and how these affect the faculty. At The University of West Florida, Pensacola, the university contact person first deals directly with the faculty consultant who provides the inservice assistance. It is clearly understood, however, that faculty involvement is contingent upon approval of the faculty consultant's chairperson. After the university contact person and the faculty member reach tentative agreement about a forthcoming service, the TEC office sends a form to the chairperson for his or her approval. At several other universities, the TEC contact works first with the chairperson, who then in turn seeks out an appropriate faculty member. In both situations, the department chairperson is kept informed, thus assuring his or her cooperation.

It is critical that the faculty consultant clearly understands what the school district desires. Many highly competent consultants have failed miserably because of a lack of clarity concerning their task. Under the Florida TEC system, there are several built-in safeguards against such disasters. First, workshops are keyed to a school district's master plan for staff development. A specific outline of the workshop is developed spelling out both cognitive and performance goals. Second, all TEC inservice is on a non-credit basis only, thereby removing the workshop participants from the "threat" of a grade. As a result, many participants are quite vocal when their needs are not being met. Finally, an evaluation is conducted after each workshop, insuring immediate feedback. University faculty members who learn that their presentation is not what the participants desired have then made adjustments.

Staff development has a greater chance of success when the consultant thoroughly understands the workshop's specific objectives. To this end the school district should appoint a knowledgeable, well-respected contact person in the district. In this way, the faculty consultant has a person to clarify and provide direction prior to the workshop.

Internal communication is strengthened by such small considerations as providing each consultant with a list of other workshop consultants and with maps to the workshop site. This encourages faculty members to share

rides and facilitates pre-workshop communication to offset possible problems of overlap or duplication in presentations.

There are many subtleties in TEC communication. For instance, the time a university takes to respond to a school district's specific workshop request can often communicate a positive or negative message. Response time--especially in the early stages of a program--is often equated with the value the university places on the program. Ironically, a rapid negative response is often viewed more favorably by the school district than a long-delayed positive response.

The method used to select consultants can communicate many things. Ideally the university and school district should participate together in the selection of the consultants. If a school district makes a specific request for a consultant, the request should be honored. For the university to do otherwise implies paternal discounting of the school district's ability to select consultants. If a school district bypasses the university contact person to deal directly with the university faculty member, the implication is that the district has little trust in this individual to make a proper selection. Other problems can result if a university insists that all the consultants come from the university. There are specific areas of knowledge or performance where school district personnel are more current than university faculty. For example, a district finance officer may be of more assistance to another district finance officer on a particular problem than the university's finance professor.

Consultant Effectiveness

University consultants are most effective if they pay attention to their delivery style, to adult learning, and to their attitudes.

Delivery Style

Although a consultant's delivery style may be difficult to

predetermine or to control, most popular faculty members have apparently developed a sensitivity to the "colleague status" of classroom teachers. They are there to help and assist, not to direct and criticize. According to a study conducted by Gordon Lawrence (1982), successful workshops were conducted by consultants who:

1. Involved participants in both receptive and action roles--receiving new ideas and putting them into action--rather than one role without the other.

2. Provide opportunities for participants to try out new things in their classrooms (or in simulations) and then to receive appropriate feedback from a skilled person.

3. Did not rely on lecture presentations.

4. Provided the service at the school site if the program emphasized affective or skill-performance objectives.

In addition, university consultants must be well prepared and organized. The effective use of multimedia can do much to promote interest. Handouts are especially appreciated and provide reinforcement. Classroom teachers view their time as precious, and nothing will alienate a group faster than the feeling that it is being wasted.

Adult Learning

Classroom teachers learn in ways vastly different from the methods used in many undergraduate university classrooms. According to Massey (1979), Executive Secretary of the New England Teacher Corps Network, "Adults are not children or adolescents, and a different strategy is needed by teachers of adult professionals. Adult characteristics must be considered in the design and implementation of adult learning

improvements." She adds that adults make and are responsible for own decisions, are experienced, are verbal, and are achievement-oriented. Warnat (1979), Program Director of the Adult Learning Project at American University, states "Emphasis is still placed on the cognitive dimensions of learning which represent only 10 to 20 percent of adult learning functions, while the affective dimensions encompassing 80 to 90 percent are barely touching inservice education activities."

Many problems that persist with adult learning are also due to legislatively-mandated programs which tend to emphasize cognitive skills. This is not a statement advocating the avoidance of cognitive topics. School teachers are mainly interested in ideas, concepts, and methods that work in the "real" world. Theory has to be linked to classroom practice in order to have meaning to the participants.

Attitudes

Colleges of education must examine the attitudes they project when they work cooperatively with school districts. Howsam (1982) of the University of Houston has written: "No other professional school seems to have so much tension or so little effective exchange at the boundaries between it and its profession or the places where its members work. Some of this can be attributed to the attitudes which universities display and some to problems within teacher education faculties."

Perhaps, as the old Pogo paraphrase goes, "We have met the enemy and it is us." There are university consultants who are formal and stiff. They seem perplexed when school personnel are unresponsive. There are university consultants who either do not view teachers and administrators as colleagues or who "talk down" to the workshop participants. The image teachers and administrators form will depend to a great degree on the consultant's actions and attitudes.

The university needs to examine not only its attitude toward the district personnel but also its attitude toward the concept of "field work." If a faculty member does not value or desire to engage in this type

of activity, then it is a disservice to both the university and school district to enter into such an arrangement. In a broader sense, the same applies to a university; it should never enter into a cooperative inservice effort if genuine commitment to the process is not present.

Conclusion

Education is not like baking, in which everyone who uses the same recipe should obtain, basically, the same results. The purpose of the paper has not been to outline a specific recipe, but rather to provide a general kitchen guide for a successful collaborative inservice effort between universities and school districts.

We have learned much in Florida during the past 12 years. We now know that protocol - the understanding of the habits and customs of the other party - is important. We know the essential role effective communication plays not only in establishing a collaborative relationship but also in nurturing and maintaining it. Along the way we realized some of the things consultants did that helped and other things that hindered their effectiveness. We were able to distinguish between the way adults learn and the way children learn and, finally, to recognize that the consultant's attitude contributes to the success of a program.

In the course of our journey we have sometimes found ourselves on the wrong path. Our hope is that our experience may help others avoid the mudholes.

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